



Washington State Commission on

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# Informational Alert

October 29, 2012

## Marine and Japan Tsunami Debris on Washington State Beaches

Washington beaches have experienced sporadic increases in marine debris, some likely the result of the March 11, 2011, tsunami that devastated Japan.

The tragedy claimed nearly 16,000 lives, injured 6,000 people, and destroyed or damaged countless buildings. The tsunami also swept 5 million tons of debris into the Pacific Ocean.

While 70 percent of the debris sank near Japan's shore, the remainder dispersed in the northern Pacific Ocean. Some of it has made its way to U.S. and Canadian shores – including Washington.

Marine debris is not new– [it has been an ongoing issue for decades](#).

General marine debris such as plastic bottles and floats, Styrofoam, pieces of lumber, crates and other small moveable objects are not considered hazardous. Please help out by removing and disposing of these small nonhazardous debris items whenever possible.

If you spot something on our beaches that looks potentially hazardous such as spilled oil, a drum, barrel or fuel canister, or an item that poses a navigation hazard, don't touch or try to remove it.

Call [1-855-WACOAST \(1-855-922-6278\)](tel:1-855-WACOAST)

[Flier: What to do if you see debris](#)

### Next few years will see intermittent tsunami debris

Items from many parts of the Pacific Rim, including buoys and consumer plastics, regularly wash up on Washington beaches.

NOAA predicts debris from the tsunami will show up on our shores. However, it will be difficult to tell the origin of items without unique identifying information such as an individual or company name, serial number or other specific information.

In addition, since items that enter the ocean sink, disperse, and break up along the way, and winds and ocean currents constantly change, this makes it extremely difficult to predict when, where, and what may arrive on our beaches.

### **Hazardous debris**

It's possible that hazardous materials may wash ashore such as:

- Spilled oil
- Drums and barrels
- Fuel tanks and gas containers
- Gas cylinders
- Chemical totes
- Containers with unknown fluids

Don't touch these items or try to remove them. Instead, immediately report these items by calling **1-855-WACOAST** (1-855-922-6278) and pressing "1."

[State](#) and [federal](#) authorities will lead response efforts to remove any immediate threats to public health, safety and the environment.

### **Debris unlikely to be radioactive**

Radiation experts from the [Washington State Department of Health](#) do not anticipate finding marine debris with [elevated radiation levels](#). Earlier tests on items that have washed up revealed only expected low, background levels of radiation. Click [here](#) for more information.

If you have questions about potential radiation issues related to marine debris, including potential tsunami debris, please contact the state Health Department at 360-236-3300, email at [radtsunamidebris@doh.wa.gov](mailto:radtsunamidebris@doh.wa.gov).

### **Invasive species on marine debris**

The [Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) expects finding marine debris with [invasive species](#) will be rare – likely limited to large marine structures that normally spend a long time in foreign waters and require heavy equipment to move such as:

- Docks and wharfs
- Navigation aids
- Breakwaters
- Some boats and ships, though many vessels are regularly removed from the water for maintenance, reducing risk for invasive species

People may find organisms attached on smaller debris items – sometimes in heavy accumulations – but these will be common open-ocean species such as the [pelagic gooseneck barnacle](#), which do not pose a threat to our marine ecosystem. Go [here](#) for more information.

If you find an object you suspect has invasive species, call **1-855-WACOAST** (1-855-922-6278) and press “3” to leave a message for state authorities. Be sure to include as much information about the object’s location as possible and your phone number for follow-up questions.

### **Leave it natural**

Stripping the beach of its driftwood depletes needed coastal habitat.

The [Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission](#) asks people who want to clean debris from beaches to focus on small, non-natural items such as plastic, Styrofoam, other synthetic materials, glass and metal.

Please leave untreated wood, seaweed, eelgrass, other plant materials, shells and crabs because these are an important part of the beach ecosystem.

### **Keep beach fires clean**

Under state law, it is illegal to burn garbage, and construction and demolition debris. Click [here](#) for more information.

You may see more wood than usual on our beaches but the state [Ecology Department](#) asks people not to burn driftwood. Here’s why: Salt residue from ocean waters stays in pores of the wood, even after it’s dry.

When burned, the chlorine reacts with the wood to form toxic compounds called dioxins that are released in the smoke. These toxic chemicals can affect the immune system.

When beach fires are permitted, bring seasoned, non-driftwood, and enjoy!

### **NOAA monitoring debris, seeking information from public**

NOAA is the best source of information about [Japan tsunami marine debris](#) including modeling, protocols to follow in handling marine debris, and frequently asked questions and answers about tsunami debris.

More information is available at NOAA's Japan tsunami debris [Information and FAQs](#) page.

### **Washington State Partner Agencies**

- [Washington State Marine Debris web portal](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health](#) – potential radiation concerns
- [Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife](#) – potential invasive species concerns
- [Washington State Department of Ecology](#) – potential hazardous materials concerns, solid waste concerns

- [Washington State Military's Department's Emergency Management Division](#)
- [Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission](#)

#### **Federal Partner Agencies**

- [NOAA Marine Debris Program](#)
- [NOAA Japanese Tsunami Marine Debris](#)

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**CAPAA was established by the state legislature in 1974 to improve the well-being of Asian Pacific Americans (APAs) by insuring their access to participation in the fields of government, business, education, and other areas. It has a board made up of 12-governor appointed members that represent the diverse APA communities of Washington State.**

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